1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ea-plantations. In this district too there has been very considerable 648
nfiltration of Nepalis, coming from their crowded and relatively
nfertile country; more industrious and better cultivators than the
epchas, the Nepali are continuously displacing them everywhere.
The Lepchas also appear to be a dying race; there is a difference 161
f about 5,000 between the 1901 and the 1931 census; but the figures
or Sikkim are perhaps not altogether reliable. As a society, with
s unique conglomeration of attitudes, the Lepchas are certainly
isappearing, for their culture presupposes a homogeneous inter-
ocking community, and this, as well as their almost complete
ppression of competition and aggression, causes an inevitable
reakdown of their culture in any mixed community. This book 361
ould have been impossible if the Maharajah of Sikkim had not
ade the part of his estate called Zongu into a Lepcha reserve, 657
here he has made a law that only pure-blooded Lepchas may
ecome landowners. It is only in Zongu and in one or two small
llages outside the reserve that there is a homogeneous Lepcha
ciety, practically undisturbed by alien influence. These survivals
n be considered artificial, as without the indirect pacification of
e British government and the benevolence of the Maharajah, these
epchas would, like their fellows, have been ousted from the little
d poor land which remains to them. But beyond the reservation
this piece of land for their exclusive use the society has not been
terfered with, nor preserved as a museum piece; it is still, as
ill be seen later, in a state of constant modification; indeed the
onomic changes of the last thirty years are likely to be particularly
r-reaching.
Of the Lepchas outside Zongu I can say very little, for I only 184
d slight opportunities of observing them. In Sikkim they appear
subsist fairly well in the mixed communities, to a very great
tent adopting the habits, culture, and even the language of their
ighbours; they share with them the religion of lamaism, which is
e official religion of the State. In India they constitute only a
y minority of the population of the district; they appear to have
t almost all corporate unity; they have practically completely
rgotten their own language, and it would appear that none of the
ldren round Kalimpong at any rate can speak anything except
epali. Lost in the overwhelming mass of alien people, the Lepchas
ve no social organisation; and since Lepcha life is based on the
cial group they have been left with little except their appearance
d their gentleness which can be called specifically Lepcha. All

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

the Lepchas' ethics and attitudes which go to make a culture are founded on a community of equal citizens; divorced from such a community the Lepcha culture is meaningless. To some extent the Lepchas have adapted themselves to the changed conditions, accepting the way of life and language of their neighbours. But compared with the Nepali and Plains Indians they are wasteful agriculturists and they have a relatively high standard of living; despite some legal protection—the Lepcha cannot be dispossessed of his last five acres of land—it seems as though they must disappear fairly rapidly, either through want or through absorption. In India a certain amount of intermarriage goes on between Lepchas and Nepali; the Lepcha woman is esteemed for her physical appearance and her mild and yielding character.

In the last census nearly all Lepchas are entered as Buddhists; a little over a thousand had been converted to Christianity. Despite the small numbers the Lepchas represent one of the most fruitful fields of missionary endeavour in Northern India; and the conversion of individuals to Christianity seems to have modified the converts' character far more profoundly than the earlier group conversion to Buddhism. The Christians with whom I came in contact exhibited a strong sense of individual sin (an attitude lamaism has been unable to implant) and excessive prudery, with which was coupled a tendency to snigger at excretory functions.

ii

In an endeavour to gain converts the Baptist mission went to the length of translating and printing in the artificial Lepcha script three books of the New Testament. This seems to have been a work of almost complete supererogation, for the Lepcha script, never widely known, has now completely fallen into disuse; in order to read the scriptures Lepchas have to learn a new, and otherwise completely useless, alphabet; most of them are far more familiar with Nepali.

The Lepcha alphabet was invented at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century by King Cha-dor of Sikkim. According to Albert Grünwedel the Lepcha alphabet is derived from a form of the Tibetan U-med alphabet.[8] Some sort

[8] This resemblance is not very obvious to the lay eye; out of the 56 Lepcha characters 18 have no parallel in the U-med alphabet, and, of the 38 signs common to both, over half have very different forms.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

my mind, that Nepali settlers would increase the yield of this extremely fertile land threefold; but they would do it to their own individual advantage. But if the Nepali, why not the Lepcha? The Lingtem people were always complaining that they could not afford an iron roof for the monastery. I should personally regret to see the present thatch removed; but that is for purely æsthetic reasons. A roof of corrugated iron would doubtless be more efficient, and if the people really want one, to say nothing of schools and other desiderata, it would be perfectly possible for them, by means of better agricultural methods, to raise the necessary funds. As at present constituted they have in their social structure all the makings of the perfect socialist state; but they have, of course, no leaders. What they require is a missionary; a non-religious missionary, that is; someone of the type that has obtained such remarkable results amongst the one-time ignorant peasants of Russia.

Jongu is now protected for the Lepchas and is to all intents and purposes an ethnological museum. Since it is a museum it may just as well be a good one; and the improvement of the people's condition, in which I would include sufficient education to free them from the thraldom of gods and demons, would form an unique opportunity for some educated Lepcha. There are many such in the Kalimpong district, where education has been long available; but removed from their natural environment Lepchas are forced to suppress their more altruistic characteristics in the general struggle for existence. In a district which cannot absorb even a fraction of its educated population this state of affairs is inevitable; at any rate until such time as manual work is no longer considered to be unsuited to the dignity of the so-called educated classes. In the meantime here is a chance for some public-spirited Lepcha; someone who still has some regard for the better qualities of the tribe to which he belongs. If the Jongu people remain as at present their total extinction as a separate tribe is only a matter of a few more generations. This, in view of their many admirable qualities,